

Mia Gonzalez

Ms. Cassady

AP English Literature and Composition

04 March 2022

We Can, We Should, Why Not?

The coronavirus shocked our world. We have tried our best to combat this disease, and our defenses have evolved. We began by stocking up on toilet paper and sanitizing groceries. Then we learned the effectiveness of masks and social distancing. Now, we finally have a fully FDA-approved vaccine. The efficacy and safety of the vaccine have been established. We know it works. We know more vaccination means less death and slowing the spread of covid. However, only 54 percent of Americans are fully vaccinated (Wen). This crisis begs the question: what is the best way to increase vaccination rates? Some have thrown out the ever-so-controversial idea of a federal vaccine mandate. Americans have voiced their concerns about potential unconstitutionality, better alternatives, or inconvenience. However, not all of these counterarguments are as sound as they appear. We should mandate vaccines because we can, we should, and why not?

“What about my rights?” A common retort to the possibility of a mandate.

It’s true that at first glance, this idea may seem awfully dictatorial—like an infraction on your freedom of bodily autonomy. While that is technically true, we give up freedoms all the time for the safety of our community. The Constitution grants Americans the right to bear arms. But we don’t protest when we’re asked to give up this right to fly on airplanes. Vaccine mandates

are nothing new, and have already been ruled constitutional by the Supreme Court. In the early 1900s, a vaccine mandate was instituted in Massachusetts to combat smallpox (Lea). Of course, this was challenged in the 1905 case *Jacobson v. Massachusetts*. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of the mandate, and Judge John Marshall Harlan stated, “the rights of the individual in respect of his liberty may at times...be enforced by reasonable regulations, as the safety of the general public may demand” (Lea). In simple terms, your rights end when they begin infringing on someone else’s. If you want to live off the grid—closed off from society where your actions only affect yourself—do as you please. However, enjoying the fruits of a civilized society requires relinquishing some autonomy to protect yourself and your community.

Legality does not inherently constitute necessity—just because it’s legal to mandate a vaccine doesn’t mean we should. So why do it? Why don’t we incentivize vaccination? Why don’t we try harder to convince people to do it independently? We have, and it has been to little avail (Wen). The people resistant to vaccination do not all flock from the same community. The resistance has been bipartisan, coming from multiple religions and professions, even nurses (Bellafante). If all *medical personnel* cannot be convinced to become vaccinated, how do we expect to persuade teachers, lawyers, or construction workers? If the vaccine is so great, why are there so many people who don’t want it? The reason is, unfortunately, misinformation, something we can all agree runs rampant in America. It’s easy to be exposed to and even believe the most far-fetched claims, like the ever-so-sophisticated microchip theory or President Trump’s “miracle solution” of the liver-failure-inducing hydroxychloroquine (Bellafante). The battle to fight fear and misinformation to get an entire population on the same page is one we do not have

time for—not when lives are at stake. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, over 1,500 American lives are ending every day (Wen). We can work on education and calming fears while operating under a federal mandate.

Finally, it won't hurt. Why not get vaccinated?

Is it annoying to have to get a vaccine even if you've already had covid? Could it even be a waste of time? Sure. But your inconvenience doesn't outweigh what is a life or death matter for others. Yes, you could fight it, and some have been successful. Professor Todd Zywicki filed a lawsuit to exempt himself from his school's vaccination policy (Bellafante). He won, but at what cost? In the amount of time it took him to file a lawsuit, he could've gotten vaccinated a hundred times. Maybe he was utterly immune to covid, and the vaccine was useless. So what? If the biggest argument against a federal mandate is the risk of a wasted half-hour, the correct answer seems clear. A federal vaccine mandate will save lives, increase vaccination, and slow the spread of covid. *We can* legally do it, *we should* logically do it, and we have no reason *not* to.

Works Cited

Bellafante, Ginia. "The Second Act of the Vaccine Resistance." *New York Times*, 10 Sept. 2021. Accessed 4 Mar. 2022.

Lea, Robert. "Have Vaccines Ever Been Mandated in History? Biden COVID Shot Plans Could Affect 100m People." *Newsweek*, 10 Sept. 2021. Accessed 4 Mar. 2022.

Wen, Leana. "Opinion: Biden's Six-Step Covid Strategy Does Not Go Far Enough to Compel Vaccinations." *Washington Post*, 9 Sept. 2021. Accessed 4 Mar. 2022.